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Kuchma Investigated in Journalist's Murder

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KIEV - Ukraine's state prosecutor on Tuesday formally opened a criminal case against former President Leonid Kuchma on suspicion of involvement in organizing the murder of opposition journalist Heorhiy Gongadze in 2000.

"A criminal case has been opened in relation to Kuchma. He is suspected of involvement in illegal actions and the murder of ... Gongadze," Deputy Prosecutor Renat Kuzmin told a news conference.

He said restrictions had been imposed on Kuchma's movements.

Gongadze, whose online newspaper Ukrainska Pravda was sharply critical of Kuchma's term in office, disappeared in September 2000 in Kiev. His headless body was found six weeks later in woodland outside the city.

The scandal heightened when a leading opposition politician made public audiotapes on which a voice, resembling that of Kuchma's, was heard ordering officials to "deal with"

Gongadze.

Kuchma, 72, who was president from 1994 to 2005, has always denied involvement in Gongadze's murder.

"Kuchma is suspected of abuse of power, of giving illegal instructions to the interior ministry's leadership which consequently led to the murder of the journalist," Kuzmin said.

"The audio tapes ... are recognized as material evidence in the case," he added.

Last September, the state prosecutor named Yury Kravchenko, who was interior minister at the time, as the person who had instigated and ordered his killing.

Two Interior Ministry officers are already in jail for their part in killing Gongadze, while a third person, former police General Oleksiy Pukach, is awaiting trial.

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